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SIPDIS

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FROM U.S. MISSION IN ROME

STATE FOR IO/EDA AND AFR

INFO USAID FOR DCHA, OFDA GOTTLIEB AND AFR LAVELLE

USDA FOR FAS HUGHES

GENEVA FOR NKYLOH/USAID

BRUSSELS FOR PLERNER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: EAID EAGR AF PREF UN FAO

SUBJECT: Sparring with FAO over Locusts

REF: (A) Rome 722, (B) Rome 1488, (C) State 165987

¶1. (U) Summary. Over the past several weeks we have been active in promoting a better international response to the Sahel desert locust emergency. On September 10, 2004, USUN Rome invited permanent representatives of potential donor countries and countries affected by the current outbreak of desert locusts concentrated in Northwest Africa to discuss the desert locust problem and what can be done about it. The meeting gave the parties an opportunity to sound out their views in advance of an informal FAO meeting scheduled for the following Friday, on September 17, 2004. In the FAO event, Director General (DG) Diouf blamed poor donor response, emphasizing the few funds "received," for FAO's slow progress in controlling the desert locust outbreak. Several affected countries lobbied for more contributions, and some donor countries questioned FAO's capacity to respond to the desert locust outbreak appropriately.

¶2. (U) In a press briefing later the same day, Diouf reiterated the criticism of donor countries for the weak international response to the crisis. In reply, Ambassador Hall made a statement to Reuters that expressed the US' serious disappointment with how FAO had dealt with the crisis. The Ambassador also enumerated FAO failings in more detail in a non-public letter sent to DG Diouf. The Reuters service piece effectively got through our message. In a meeting with the Ambassador on September 21, Diouf agreed that there was room all around for a better coordinated and implemented approach to the crisis. On September 22, we received from Diouf a detailed response to our letter. Both letters are being sent septel. End summary.

US Mission Discussion with Donors

¶3. (U) At the September 10 meeting, Ambassador Hall opened the meeting by inviting delegates to be candid in discussing how the natural calamity arose and what should be done now, and he also encouraged delegates to share information received from their missions and field offices.

¶4. (U) Dr. Yene T. Belayneh, USAID/DCHA/OFDA's locust expert, summarized the genesis of the desert locust outbreak, current status, extent of damage, and next steps. Dr. Belayneh stated that much of the approximately \$40 million pledged to FAO was provided too late to contain the locusts, and he described likely scenarios in the near future.

¶5. (U) Discussions shifted to FAO's role in mobilizing a coherent and effective response to the locust crisis. FAO was quick to point out that its main role is to provide information and give advice to the governments of affected countries. In addition, given FAO's mandate as the lead UN agency for locust control activities, some of the meeting's attendees were surprised that FAO did not act earlier and establish its Emergency Center for Locust Operations (ECLO) until August 25, 2004, more than ten months after the initial locust outbreak and six months after its formal appeal.

¶6. (U) FAO explained that ECLO's purpose is to avoid duplication of effort at headquarters, communicate expert guidance more effectively with the field and other stakeholders. It also formalized an internal working

group consisting of representatives from three departments: Administration and Finance (AF), Agriculture (AG), and Technical Cooperation (TC), along with coordination with the Office of the Director-General. In addition, FAO stated that ECLO had been operational for some time and the announcement was merely a formality.

¶17. (SBU) FAO also represented that although it has received \$24.2 million in formal commitments, only \$9.5 million is available for expenditures. The difference, \$14.7M, cannot be spent because, according to FAO, "We haven't received the money from the donors." In addition to formal commitments, FAO said that another \$9.4 million is in the pipeline. (Comment: These figures do not tally with higher figures FAO provided a day earlier, nor do they include funds provided in 2003 from the USAID/OFDA grant for emergency pest control.)

¶18. (SBU) European and USG representatives delved more deeply into FAO's use of available funds to respond quickly to emergencies. FAO mentioned that it had established and is using a rapid response fund, which it characterized as a revolving fund of \$2M. To date, FAO estimates that it has used the fund to spend "in the neighborhood of \$500K to \$1M."

¶19. (SBU) The Dutch Ambassador spoke at length about "serious obstacles" faced by FAO in mobilizing resources and reporting its actions effectively. He urged FAO to provide more visibility and transparency about the use of funds, particularly what FAO is providing in people and equipment, in order to permit his government to assess FAO's efforts to date. "We need more information about how money is spent and where." He also urged FAO to establish a mechanism for better regional coordination.

Diouf Meeting with Donors

¶110. (U) A week later, on September 17, DG Diouf provided an extensive chronology of FAO's actions to notify the international community about the locust upsurge, the evolution of FAO's appeal from \$9 million in February, to \$30 million in July, and now \$100 million, and he also praised FAO's organizational capacity to deal effectively with the emergency.

¶111. (U) During several interventions DG Diouf stated that FAO has "received" only \$4 million "\$2 million arrived two days ago from the US" -- and he tied the limited funds received with FAO's limited ability to respond to the crisis. He also said that donor countries "committed" \$15.8M, but because funds in such amounts have not been "received," (i.e., in the bank), FAO cannot "spend" or "transfer" them to other accounts.

¶112. (SBU) Algeria, Cape Verde, Mali, and Mauritania asked for more contributions, and Morocco suggested that a "new mechanism" might be needed to control the outbreak.

¶113. (SBU) Responding to Diouf's criticism of donors while neglecting his own organization's failures, Ambassador Hall said that all parties -- donor countries, recipient countries, "and the FAO -- could do better." He also related that reports from the field about FAO indicate that in spite of late contributions, FAO should have responded more effectively and been better organized.

¶114. (SBU) France asked for greater visibility into all sources of funds allocated for the desert locust outbreak. Italy

stated that the real issue is not whether the parties have lived up to their responsibilities, but whether FAO has the right mechanisms in place to manage funds received. The Netherlands recommended that FAO focus on limiting future crop damage because of the prospect for food insecurity in the area. In addition, future assistance may be bilateral, not multilateral, suggesting that the Netherlands may provide funds to FAO at the country level, but not to FAO headquarters.

¶115. (SBU) IFAD has given permission to countries in the region to transfer a total of \$1.5 million in IFAD-provided funds to FAO at the country level. The EC announced that it is supporting a request of 30 million Euros, that a total of 32 million Euros for the locust outbreak will be approved by the end of September 2004.

¶116. (SBU) Canada asked whether FAO has systems in place to use such large infusions of funds. (Comment: We later learned that this comment from the Canadian Ambassador had deeply upset DG Diouf. Immediately after the September 17 press conference, he chaired a two-hour session going through FAO's actions with his senior staff. His ending comment to his staff was, "Now that we have the resources, we better deliver.")

Press play

¶17. (U) When Diouf took his criticism of donors to the press, the Ambassador, in an interview with Reuters, levied a barrage at FAO's own inadequacies in attacking the crisis. The Reuters story achieved the results we hoped for. In a meeting on September 21, Diouf admitted to the Ambassador there was plenty of blame to share, from the recipient countries, to the donors, to FAO, itself. In Diouf's written response to the Ambassador's letter criticizing FAO's performance in meeting the needs of this crisis, Diouf agreed to our suggestion that an after-action lessons-learned assessment would be useful.

Cleverley

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